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ABSTRACT

The booklet is intended to help classroom teachers to provide appropriate education for gifted elementary students. A first section rebuts typical arguments against gifted programing (such as that identification procedures are too costly) and discusses the teacher's role in bringing schools and parents together. The second section considers the teacher's role in the classroom, reviews approaches to independent learning, and notes the importance of striking a cognitive-affective balance. Final thoughs in Section Three touch on setting priorities, evaluating gifted programs, and helping students toward self actualization. (CL)

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Getting Your School Ready For The Gifted

by
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Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Barbara Thompson, Ph.D., State Superintendent

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Foreword

What can be done to offer appropriate education for the gifted in elementary schools? Dr. Elaine Bartel, Professor of Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, states the problem and offers a variety of suggestions to teachers who are struggling with this issue.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction is happy to have the opportunity to publish this document on a topic which needs great airing and action.

We are grateful for the support of Title V, 505 Design for the Gifted funds to increase awareness and hopefully enhance education of the gifted. I am especially pleased Dr. Bartel could author this paper. She has been a member of the Wisconsin State Advisory Committee for the Gifted since 1970 and has taught classes for teachers of the gifted at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

We welcome your comments and reactions to this paper.

Barbara Thompson, Ph.D.
State Superintendent

Introduction

Classroom teachers are currently making personal commitments of time and energy to promote programs of study for their ablest students. We have a choice to make—either encourage these teachers, support their efforts, and offer them specific, concrete assistance with this important task; or succumb to the old traps and offer documented excuses for inertia.

What is being done in the educational world to enhance the leadership potential of our superior students? We know we can identify gifted children in sufficient time to nurture their gifts, yet in almost every case there are no special, qualitatively different programs or services available to them until they reach the intermediate-grade level, if indeed such programs are available then. And to add to the dilemma, we also know that by the time children identified as gifted reach that level of schooling, many of them have irreversibly tuned out.

What great wastes have resulted, what medical cures have been left undiscovered, what crucial social research left undone, we can only speculate. We need to move from reaction to action; and though that action cannot take place immediately on a global scale, we can always make beginnings, small and insignificant as they might seem, remembering that no great journey ever begins without someone taking that crucial first step.

For some teachers, these efforts will represent that first step; for others, positive movement toward a partially-realized though distant goal. Where one is on the continuum is not nearly so important as the fact that one is moving in a positive direction. If this writing can in some way encourage or assist teachers in providing or enriching programs for their gifted students, it will have been well worth the effort.

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I

From Home to School: Bridging the Gap

Variety vs. Conformity

Schools ought not to be institutions of conformity. Despite all that can be said in favor of America as the great melting pot of the world, that concept should not be a determining factor in developing curricular programs for children. Consider for a moment the chef who, after painstakingly preparing all the ingredients for a tossed salad, places the entire mixture in the electric blender and serves the resulting dish to the guests! After consideration of the innovative characteristics of the concoction, the ease with which it could be eaten and digested, and all the other potential points in its favor, one would still question why it was not served with all its individual ingredients identifiable.

We can also justifiably question why educationists, and they include curriculum developers and auxiliary personnel as well as classroom teachers, persist in their tacit goal of making all children in any one class become more and more alike in their academic achievements by subjecting them all to similar learning activities, when their great variety of pre-school experiences makes this practice ludicrous.

We talk of readiness: readiness for school (whatever that could possibly imply) as well as reading readiness, as though all children who come to us "not ready," can be put through a specific, one-for-all-and-all-for-one program, and presto, they are "ready!" Any kindergarten teacher knows that some children come to school reading, with full understanding of the material read, while other children are no more "ready" at the end of the readiness program than they were before they were placed in the program.

The school has made all kinds of elaborate preparations for the latter group, complete with labels for every conceivable category. These "not ready" children in most instances have a slot into which they can move, where they and their parents are assured that every effort will be made to meet their educational needs and to prepare them to assume a meaningful role in society.

But what about those who were accomplished, independent learners before they entered the readiness program? What programs or services have been planned for them? Since the answer to that question is all too obvious, let us shift our attention to some of the reasons given for the educational neglect of these children.

(1) Identification procedures are too costly.

We might well ask: In comparison with what? Considering the tremendous waste of talent that inevitably results from the gifted fading into obscurity, this argument seems at best weak. Furthermore, identification procedures need not be all that costly. Research has demonstrated, for example, that a kindergarten teacher's judg-

ment of a child's reading achievement potential is as predictively valid as are standardized test measures. Such teacher judgments represent no monetary expenditures, yet many of our nation's school systems spend a great deal of money on reading readiness tests, and then in many cases do not make diagnostic use of the results.

In systems where children are tested prior to school entrance, the same tests could be used as part of the screening and identification process for gifted youngsters. This again would represent no additional costs for the school system.

If an early screening process were initiated which utilized primary-level teacher observation, parent input, peer nomination, and whatever standardized measures were used in the school, a pool of potential candidates could be screened, and at that point the services of auxiliary personnel (guidance counselors, psychometrists, etc.) could be used to administer individual tests to a smaller group who were thought to be of superior ability.

When it is recognized that gifted children have as much right to an education that will enable them to achieve in accordance with their inherent ability, then money and services will be provided for the gifted, and not by taking help away from the more obviously handicapped. While we are developing this level of support we must at the same time provide for these children as best we can.

(2) Specific guidelines for the development of programs for the gifted are not as yet readily available.

The old trap of "When in doubt, do nothing," becomes an appealing argument when we realize that specific guidelines will never exist in a form which gives teachers a definitive program or set of principles that will guarantee a successful program for all gifted pupils. At that point, the temptation to stick with time-tested classroom traditionalism becomes even more attractive.

One might argue that if educationally sound programs can be established for children with severe learning disorders, we should be able to establish a basic program for the gifted, assuming the availability of necessary resources. But gifted children are not easily grouped, especially if we define gifted in terms other than "high I.Q." It is conceivable that five children who have been identified as gifted would have no common traits, so that a program which would be suitable for one could have nothing to offer any of the other four. While this increases the challenge of providing meaningful programs for the gifted, it does not rule out the possibility of doing so.

One might well argue that if teachers would really individualize within their classrooms, there would be no need for special programs for the gifted. The fact is that our principles and our practices are in most cases miles apart. When we become as adept at putting into practice the beliefs which we so firmly espouse, we will be well on the way to providing meaningful programs for the gifted within the regular classroom. Until then, there is great need to provide individual, special programs and services beyond those offered in the regular school program.

(3) By providing programs for the gifted, we would be encouraging the establishment of an elite group.

If by elite we mean that the intellectual leadership we so desperately need would emerge because of the educational opportunities offered this group, then our efforts should be bent in this direction without further discussion. But if it is argued that special programs will produce a group of snobbish, self-centered individuals, we need only seek the counsel of teachers who have worked with these groups. They are quick to dispute this myth, insisting that more often than not, gifted students possess definite traits of humility, sincerity, and deep concern for humanity. While the gifted are not willing to compromise their integrity, they do not wish to be looked upon as "different," and will in many instances take great pains to actually hide their talents, and thus appear "average."

Those seeking data in support of a do-nothing stand will find an abundance of documented evidence, but there is an ever-increasing nucleus of parents, teachers, and administrators who have become aware of the educational needs of gifted students, and have expanded this awareness to include a commitment to support the planning and establishment of educational programs for their most able youth.

Principles vs. Reality

The well known truism, "Your actions speak so loudly that I cannot hear what you are saying," has great implications for American education. There is general if not universal acceptance of a host of noble-sounding principles; yet our everyday educational procedures would lead observers to conclude that we did not believe one word of what we espouse. For example, we know that children come to us with a great variety of all-important pre-school experiences, with a range of vocabulary that indicates a vast continuum of language arts skills; yet in many instances we plan a series of "learning" experiences for them as if they all came out of an identical mold. Needless to say, the child who was ready before being subjected to the readiness program starts early, and perhaps even unconsciously, to wander off on mental excursions which are found to be more rewarding intrinsically, but which sooner or later will lead to confrontation in the all-important games some teachers play.

Another example is the accepted principle that how children feel about themselves as learners, is all-important, and must be dealt with before real learning can occur. We say we believe it, and can find exemplary actions by teachers in classrooms for educationally handicapped children. But what about the gifted child's self-concept? When a teacher feels a gifted child can be ignored simply because of scores well above grade level, or that superior abilities can be put to constant use in helping the underachievers, that teacher's principles are not in harmony with reality, and great injustices for gifted children are the unfortunate but certain result.

We are also quick to accept the principle that no child should be forced to work with curricular activities or materials that are too difficult at the time, or have been

already mastered. Yet instead of designing flexible management systems which would allow and encourage children to move at their own pace just as soon as they are able to handle this freedom responsibly, grouping practices are used which preclude such individualization.

The principle that children should assume responsibility for their own learning also is generally accepted; but instead of providing students with the necessary guidance and practice which would enable them to move gradually from teacher dependency to self-initiated learning, we somehow assume that children possess a built-in sense of responsibility, or that the degree to which they are able to assume responsibility is in direct proportion to their intelligence score.

The wide discrepancies between what we believe and what we practice should awaken in each of us the realization that any gains we can make in bridging this gap between theory and classroom practice will benefit all children—especially the gifted and talented.

Dreams vs. Fulfillment

For most parents, the birth of their child represents a time of great joy. Even before the child is born, elaborate plans are made to enable the parents to provide what they consider to be the best that life can offer. During the infant and pre-school years each new accomplishment (first word, first step, toilet training, handling a fork and spoon, etc.) is greeted with pride and positive reinforcement. Under the loving guidance of the parents, the child gradually moves from a self-centered world into a society of interaction with an ever-increasing number of people. Although the limited resources of the home and the informal, intuitively-acquired techniques of the parents are often belittled by early childhood experts, the quantity and quality of what is learned in the language arts and basic, foundational concepts in all curricular areas is mind-boggling, even to the "experts." We are talking about the "average" child who learned to use compound and complex sentences before the experts could administer tests and insure that the simple sentence had been thoroughly mastered, and who developed a sense of right and wrong, of important and trivial, of fact and fantasy, all without the help of formal education. While it is true that some parents seek help with child-rearing and should have assistance when and to the extent that it is needed, it must be conceded that most parents have provided meaningful, effective pre-school learning experiences for their children, within their homes and immediate families.

Approximately two out of 100 children are born with truly exceptional intellectual gifts. These children are found among all races and within all socio-economic groups. In many such cases, one or both parents, though not always formally educated, also are of superior ability, and want for their child an education that will enable persuit of a meaningful, self-actualizing, self-chosen career or profession. They provide appropriate materials and experiences during the child's early years. They encourage new learnings informally, and they provide opportunities for the child to interact with intellectually-matched peers whenever possible. In most such

cases, these gifted children will have taught themselves to read long before their formal schooling begins; and since most educators are really hung on *teaching* reading skills (in contras. to letting children use these skills to enjoy reading), one might well ask what will happen when these gifted children appear on the school scene, ready and eager to continue discovering their world!

It has often been said that children in general come to school eager to learn, curious and creative; yet by the time they reach the third or fourth grade their curiosity subsides, their questions cease, and their creativity is lost. If this really happens to most children, in how much greater measure does it happen to gifted children? And what about the dreams and plans which their parents had for these gifted children? Remembering all too well their own experiences that opportunities in the real world are dependent upon formal schooling and conformity, how are they to realistically continue to guide and counsel their children? To what extent must they compromise their own integrity to prepare their children for the competition of the real world after painstakingly guiding them into areas of humanitarian concern?

A conflict often develops between home and school, and the gifted child is caught in the middle. The real tragedy is that the conflict could have been avoided and certainly should have been. Considering the great strides we have made in technological development, one would think that our expertise in communication would long since have reached the stage at which parents, teachers, and school administrators could sit down together and plan appropriate educational programs for able children. Despite all the arguments that time does not permit such conferences, we all know that in the final analysis vast amounts of time and energy would be saved by putting talent to work in an appropriate manner, and all concerned would stand to gain.

Why, then, does such communication between home and school so rarely occur? Teachers are often surprised to learn that parents have real misgivings concerning their abilities to handle their gifted children; and parents are just as surprised to learn that teachers almost never formally learned to provide meaningful programs for the gifted.

Recently the writer spoke at a workshop for parents and teachers of gifted children. Following the discussion, a parent waited for the group to leave and then wanted to talk about the problem she had because her gifted first-grade daughter was bored with the reading program offered at her school and which she had long since mastered. After questioning, it was discovered that this parent had never approached her daughter's teacher for fear of the possible consequences of such a conference. At this point a second person entered into the discussion, saying that she was a first-grade teacher. She also said that she had a child in her class who gave every indication of being intellectually gifted. This teacher's problem was that she did not know what to do to encourage this child to continue learning at her accelerated pace. Her school's budgetary practices would not permit her to purchase any extra materials, and she feared that if the child were kept with the other children academically, she would soon lose interest in school.

To witness this parent and this teacher discover each other, complete with fears,

misgivings, and good intentions, was an experience that would benefit any classroom teacher and all parents of gifted children. Here was a parent, saying that if her child's teacher would be that receptive to a parent's concerns, she would personally purchase the materials suggested by the teacher, feeling it would be money well spent, and grateful for the guidance of the certified educator in selecting the material to be purchased. The teacher, on the other hand, was now willing to approach her gifted pupil's parents, somehow feeling for the first time that such a conference might represent a stepping stone to cooperative planning and program implementation. Now it was realized that providing an appropriate program for a gifted child was a cooperative problem and challenge, involving parents and teachers as equal partners in all aspects of the challenging task.

When barriers in communication between home and school can be broken down and replaced with serious discussions among all concerned, appropriate programs for our talented youngsters will be achieved.

II

Classroom Action/Interaction: Signing the Truce

The Teacher as Humanist

The literature is replete with long and impressive lists of traits which supposedly characterize the expert teacher. Yet for any single list, one can always find a good teacher who possesses no extraordinary measure of any of the traits, as well as an inept teacher who at least professes to be characterized by all of them. We cannot define excellence in teaching, but we can recognize excellent teaching when we see it, without the assistance of long lists of character traits or educational accomplishments.

The literature on gifted and talented also contains lists of traits which are felt to be prerequisite for teachers who would work with gifted students, yet upon close scrutiny these suggested traits do not differ from those espoused for any certified teacher, with perhaps one exception. This unique item is the desire on the part of the teacher to work with gifted children. It could indeed be argued that possession of all other positive traits; i.e., acceptance of each individual child, subject-matter background, the ability to motivate children to achieve in accordance with their potential, the ability to translate sound educational theory into practice, empathy, fairness, consistency, emotional stability, etc., would be fully as important for the regular classroom teacher as for the teacher of gifted children. And all of this can be summed up in one universally espoused but often overlooked dimension—Humanism.

The teacher who possesses this trait in conjunction with intelligence and concern for the educational well-being of children is indeed the artist/teacher; and despite all our efforts to improve upon our teacher-training programs, we cannot ever accept credit for these teachers' accomplishments in the educational field.

In cases where teachers are intelligent humanists, specific educational programs for their gifted students need not be provided by curriculum experts, for these teachers will inevitably work out their own curriculum, compromising only to the extent necessary for peaceful coexistence in the educational world, but never at the expense of their students, either gifted or average.

Establishing Classroom Climate

Despite the great variety of educational techniques and curriculum materials that are available to assist the practicing teacher in motivating children for learning, and

despite every positive effort expended to ensure academic achievement by students, well-meaning educators will still be powerless to *force* their students to learn.

Here an appropriate parallel can be drawn between the artist/teacher and the green-thumbed gardener; for even though a plant cannot be forced to grow anymore than a child can be forced to learn, this does not prevent the gardener from doing everything possible to facilitate the growth of each plant. Thus great pains are taken to provide adequate amounts of direct and indirect sunlight, soil nutrient, and moisture, realizing that what is good for one plant may be harmful to another whose observable characteristics are similar but whose needs are unique. Compensation is made for inherent weaknesses while enhancing opportunities for healthy growth.

A similar situation exists in the classroom of the artist/teacher who, although powerless to force a child to learn, nevertheless works to establish an optimum climate by planning learning experiences that children cannot resist. In such an environment, where each child can be challenged to attain ever-higher levels of achievement without fear of failure, learning can and does occur to a degree that far surpasses achievement in a lockstep environment.

A classroom climate which frees the learner to pursue topics of interest does not just happen. It is created only by the careful, conscious efforts of an intelligent, perceptive teacher. It involves countless hours of planning, gathering materials, studying task-grouping procedures, and developing a workable record-keeping system on the part of teachers; but any teacher who has successfully moved in this direction will testify that it is well worth the effort.

The ability of children to effectively work and study within such an environment also does not just happen. Weeks and months of preparatory work usually ensure a successful but very gradual transition from teacher dependency to independent study, but the amount of time and effort needed to make the transition varies a great deal for each student. Nor is the transition time always correlated with the child's academic ability. Some highly gifted children need a lot of help in assuming the responsibility for their own learning, while some students of average and even low ability will make great strides without any apparent need for long transitional periods.

Establishing an optimum classroom climate for learning does not mean that all children should work individually at all times. Some total-group instruction as well as flexible task groups of various sizes can be equally effective in promoting academic achievement in the various content areas. The size of the study groups is not nearly so important as the fact that students are given the opportunity to approach learning in a wide variety of ways.

The Teacher as Facilitator

Gifted children never make impressive academic strides in classrooms where the teacher assumes the role of dispenser of information and expects students to be passive recipients of such information. Despite the fact that the standardized

achievement test scores of gifted youngsters are used as impressive data to justify the regular academic program, it must be kept in mind that the gains resulting from any qualitatively-different program for the gifted will never be discovered as long as such innovative programs are not utilized. Furthermore, when teachers of superior-ability classes believe that by simply increasing the amount of trivial information to be studied and memorized by the gifted, they are providing special programs in accordance with needs, they are sadly mistaken. For this reason it is becoming increasingly important to stress the need for qualitatively-different programs for the gifted and talented; and in order to implement such programs, the role of the teacher must definitely move toward that of facilitator; one who sees to it that the right child and the appropriate book (or learning device) get together at the opportune time. When and to the extent that this change takes place, all children will benefit and attitudes toward learning will become more positive.

Children can indeed be taught to assume responsibility for their own learning. No longer can we use their assumed inability to learn independently as justification for their role of passive recipients. While students cannot be expected to suddenly and completely move from total class instruction to independent study, they can be given all the guidance and assistance they need to move gradually from teacher-directed to self-initiated learning activities, to the degree that they and the teacher can feel comfortable within the new framework.

This is not a new educational principle. It is as old as the advice given to teachers to move from the known to the unknown, but if the move is made too abruptly, teachers as well as students will have difficulty in adjusting to their new roles.

In classrooms where the teacher has become a true facilitator, there is need for only one rule, that no child may interfere with the opportunity of any other child to pursue learning. Children soon realize that when they have assumed this responsibility, there is no need for all the other rules so often handed down by the administration and enforced by the teacher. Teachers can also discover where they are on the dispender-facilitator continuum by a careful consideration of the rules they currently use and attempt to enforce in their classroom. Who made these rules? Are children asked to obey rules for which no realistic justification exists? Rules can be and often are traps which hinder a teacher in moving toward the role of facilitator of learning, and the sooner they can be discarded, the sooner the children will feel that they are important people in their classroom. If responsible behavior is expected of them, they will respond in a positive manner, for the basic human philosophy of the teacher is definitely mirrored in the classroom interaction of the students.

A teacher cannot decide to suddenly become a facilitator. This represents a long-range goal that is only partially achieved, and only by great conscious effort at that. The importance of teachers moving toward that goal, however, makes it imperative for them to set this item high on their priority list for necessary change.

The Teacher as Learner

When teachers feel comfortable in their role as facilitators of learning, they will

re-discover the joy of learning with children. They will no longer be bothered by a fear of not being able to respond to a child's request for help in one of the curricular content areas. Just as they teach children that it is more important to be able to find the information they need when they need it, than to attempt to memorize and store for later retrieval a plethora of facts; so they too will learn to be comfortable in the realization that they are never expected to serve as all-inclusive sources of information. At this point in time no one really knows what information will be of later use to students, but we can be certain that all students will need to know how to locate and use information of many different types. Gifted students especially are turned off by assignments which require them to memorize facts of doubtful validity. Already in their first-grade experience they were asked to learn and to apply phonic generalizations for which they could usually find more exceptions than examples which followed the rules. Later they offered solutions to problems which, because of the students' keen mental perception, they were unable to reconcile with the expected, "correct" answer. Thus when a gifted pupil is asked how many one-foot rulers, laid end to end, would be needed to measure a room 21 feet long, and answers "two," the answer is certainly logical and correct. The answer given in the teacher's edition is certainly neither sensible nor correct. The teacher as learner will probe to see why a child answers in a particular way. Little is learned about a child's thinking patterns if the expected "right" answer is given. When the child takes issue with the expected answer, a teacher can analyze the reasoning patterns. Answer keys should be available to children as a source of information. If they don't need them they will not use them; and if they do need them, they should be at their disposal without making them feel they are cheating by using them.

To the extent that the teacher becomes a learner in the classroom, learning activities will become far more appropriate to the needs of the individual student. While this might seem to the neophyte to represent an impossible challenge for the teacher, such need not be the case. For example, there can be some basic activities that children can engage in as follow-up work to demonstrate their comprehension of material studied. If there are no problems to solve on their level, they can become adept at making up their own story problems, related to their life and interests, and in many cases far more meaningful than those found in the texts. They can create games that will serve as meaningful practice for themselves and their classmates to correspond with any curriculum topic. Gifted children can study special topics of their own choosing, or they can study in far greater depth the topics on which their classmates are working.

When teachers are recognized by their students as partners-in-learning, there is no loss of respect for those teachers, but a genuine acceptance of them as guide, counselor, catalyst, and along with many others, one source of information.

The Learner: Motivated

If, at the beginning of a unit of study, you as a teacher find it necessary to

"motivate" your students by using the "Children, wouldn't it be fun to . . . ?" approach, you might as well cash in your chips and go home. Children came to school motivated to learn. In cases where the motivation no longer exists, to try to re-awaken it by asking children to appear interested is utter foolishness. They have long since learned to do their own thing mentally while playing the game.

But, you might argue that motivation is important, and you are right. How then do you get kids motivated? Consider for a moment the fact that no children have to be motivated to do the things they want to do, things that are really important and meaningful for them at the time. If what transpires in the classroom is meaningful, and to the extent that it is meaningful for each individual, there will be no need for special motivational techniques. It is really as simple as that, in theory at least, and this again demonstrates the necessity for making students partners-in-learning, for letting able students develop their own learning activities and topics for study as a step toward establishing the type of classroom climate that is conducive to free movement and independent study. It is often helpful for teachers and students to study classroom traffic patterns and arrange desks and other furniture on the basis of such traffic patterns. The extent to which independent study can be facilitated by a unique arrangement of furniture is often surprising.

If children are involved as partners-in-learning in the classroom, there should be no need for concerns about motivating them. In fact, once children are "hooked on school" a teacher's greatest concern might well become that of balancing their educational diet with relaxation and play. A happy problem, indeed!

Moving Toward Independence

Children by nature choose to be independent learners. They started out that way, and did really well until we placed them in the straits of formal, sequential learning patterns. Just recently I watched a sixteen-month old girl who was handed a flashlight to keep her occupied while her mother was engaged in a long conference. Here was a living example of the independent learner. She shook the flashlight, threw it, retrieved it, tried to stuff as much of it as she could into her mouth, used it like a cup, turned it on and off many times, used it to light up the pictures in her favorite book, and was generally fascinated with the whole experience. Despite all we claim to know about the short attention span of one-year-olds, here was proof positive that if a child is interested in what she is doing, she will learn all she can about it, without any need for help on our part.

It has been said that if we would carefully instruct young children to play baseball, by giving them sequential lessons and testing for mastery of each step before progressing to the next step, they would never learn to play the game. But turn them loose in a field with a ball and bat, and they will become experts! So why not facilitate this type of meaningful learning in the classroom? It is the only way that individual strengths can be accommodated, and children *can* be re-taught to function within the classroom as independent learners responsible for their own education.

The Student Learning Contract

The student learning contract represents one of the most effective devices to facilitate the move toward independent study in the classroom. But here again the utilization of the contract cannot be adopted suddenly nor completely. It is suggested that a teacher begin by discussing the meaning of a contract, examples of contracts from everyday life, advantages and disadvantages of contracts, etc. This would be followed by having one or a few students who are excellent readers and have proved that they can work independently and responsibly, study in greater depth some different types of contracts (teacher-made, teacher-assigned; teacher-made, student-selected; student-made, in assigned curricular area; and student-made, in a self-selected area). The next step would be for the teacher to have prepared for each of these students a contract on a topic of their interest, demonstrating the many facets of the topic, activities from which the student could choose, and suggestions for demonstrating comprehension or mastery of content. One suggestion could be that the student write an objective test that could be administered to check such comprehension. If the student can write such a test, there is no need to take it, but it could be used as a choice later on by another student studying the same topic.

Although the initial contract is teacher-prepared, the student would still have the options of determining what would be done with the topic, how much time would be spent on it, and depending on age and maturity, a contract could be made for a specific grade, although it is hoped that evaluation of the student's work could take place in some form other than a letter grade.

While the student is working on the initial contract, the role of the teacher is of the utmost importance; for it is at this time that the student is guided into making wise decisions concerning how best to use time, how to select meaningful activities, and how to locate needed information. After working through a few such contracts in various content areas, these students will soon be able to write their own contracts, in self-selected topics, and they will also be able to serve as aides to help a few more children get started on using the contract system. It should be noted here that contracts can vary from small, one-period segments that cover a short learning activity or exercise, to a social studies or science contract that could well represent a semester's work; depending, of course, on the individual academic ability of the student. If gifted youngsters were given this opportunity to pursue learning, along with the necessary guidance and encouragement of parents, teachers, and administrators, the mental-drop-out rate among our most able students would most certainly and dramatically diminish.

In connection with the student learning contract, teachers will find it helpful, if not indeed necessary, to bring in auxiliary personnel to work with their gifted students. These persons could be aides, paraprofessionals, parents, volunteer mentors, artists-in-residence, etc. Don't be too quick to say that no such people are available before an attempt has been made to search them out. Many primary-grade teachers are now "adopting" grandparents for their classrooms. These elderly people come into the classroom on a regular, weekly basis; and needless to say, have

a great deal to offer children. This has proved mutually beneficial to the young as well as the elderly, and represents a great, untapped resource.

Maintaining Cognitive-Affective Balance

Gifted children should be given every opportunity to enhance their academic achievements in harmony with their potential abilities. To be sure, our current society needs all the scientific, technological expertise that can be developed; but it also has far greater and more pressing needs, needs that can be met only by leaders who have developed in a positive way their affective traits as well as their cognitive abilities. We have seen many examples of advanced technology deployed by self-seeking individuals to destroy rather than serve humanity. Research has demonstrated that the great majority of gifted students provided with quality programs to meet their academic needs, are unable in later years to move beyond self-centered pursuits to a genuine concern for others; many of those who take this step are unable to move to the implementation of humanitarian programs.

If as a long-range goal we want our gifted youth to become perceptive, emotionally-stable leaders who are able to effectively cope with the seemingly insurmountable problems we are presently creating, it is not too early to keep this goal in mind as we plan educational programs for the gifted at the primary grade level. Our society does not need scientific automatons who cannot distinguish right from wrong. Our need for humane and intelligent leadership is obvious.

The Learner as Teacher

We spend a great deal of time and energy in any large, bureaucratic system spelling out what we call role delineation. Everyone wants to know exactly what is expected. The demands from all corners for accountability do not help to alleviate the fears. In the face of all this concern, there are some who dare to say to teachers "Forget that you are the teacher. Learn with the kids. If some students have more expertise on a topic than you have, let them teach it in their own way!" If the classroom learning situation ever reaches the point where it is impossible for the observer to determine at any one moment who is doing the teaching and who is engaged in learning, we will have achieved a most important goal in education.

All children have something to offer other children. The gifted child often can profit from support from other children in the social context. This would alleviate the problem where the gifted student is accepted as a source of information, but is totally rejected by others on the playground. Gifted children often need help in this area; and teachers are not usually in the best position to offer this help. If children are looked upon as partners-in-teaching, however, they will be eager to serve in any capacity where they feel their services are needed, and this certainly includes the playground. If the classroom can serve as a microcosmic society, we will be in a far better position to maintain the cognitive-affective balance for students.

III

Toward Quality Education: Worlds to Conquer

Setting Priorities

In effectively dealing with any great task, it is helpful to proceed one step at a time, and in order to do that, it is necessary to set priorities. We must determine where we are now, where we want to go, and how we can get there, before effective planning can take place.

Classroom teachers, in attempting to meet the needs of gifted children, might find it helpful to list changes they would like to make in their classroom to establish qualitatively different programs for the gifted. They might even wish to form small study groups to facilitate their task. After they have compiled their list of desired changes they will need to separate the list into two parts, those changes which are within their power to make, and those over which they have no jurisdiction. An example of the latter would be the desire on the part of the teacher to have the children come to school in small groups, at staggered hours, doing a portion of their independent study at home. Because the school system operates school buses, which bring all children to school at 8:30 and pick up all children at 3:15, other arrangements would have to be made for small-group work, since the daily bus schedule is not within the teacher's power to modify.

To help students assume increasingly greater responsibility for the daily administrative procedures of the classroom, a teacher could place high on the list of priorities the establishment of a daily seminar session in which the children could bring up any topic they would like discussed, or they could use the time for evaluating the day's work or planning a subsequent unit of study. Since this change would represent an internal classroom modification, it would be within the jurisdiction of the teacher and students to implement.

After the list of priorities has been established, a realistic time schedule should be planned, keeping in mind the fact that changes should be made slowly enough so that teachers as well as students feel comfortable in the new framework.

Most significant changes in education occur quietly, almost unnoticed by those closest to the situation. The bandwagon approach is best avoided, and comparisons or competitive efforts usually do not bring desired results. If teachers seek changes for the benefit of their students, and are not overly concerned about their own potential gain, positive attitudes toward learning will be the inevitable result.

Evaluating Gifted Programs

Perhaps the controversy concerning mainstreaming vs. totally separate programs for the gifted will always be with us, but this again represents a continuum rather than an either-or position. It is sad to see time and effort wasted on a futile search for the ideal program; and when it is realized that this program is nonexistent, no program at all established for these children.

There is sufficient research and documentation to support a variety of gifted programs. The Cleveland Major Work Program* is a good example of a separate, qualitatively-different program for gifted children. Yet, there are many examples where perceptive, concerned teachers provide more for their gifted students within the regular classroom than would be provided for them in a totally separate program in which the teacher felt obliged to simply assign more work at the same grade level.

So it is with programs for the gifted. Whether the teacher is working with gifted children within the regular classroom, or whether the children are left in the regular classroom for some subject areas and placed with their intellectual peers for a scheduled portion of the school day or week, or whether the gifted are completely separated is not the crucial issue. Advantages and disadvantages could be cited for each grouping arrangement, but there appears to be an increasing consensus that some combination of mainstreaming and separation offers the most advantages for the gifted. The grouping procedure that is judged best in one locality or for one special type of gifted youngster may be obviously inadequate for a different type of gifted student in a different area or at a different age level. No set of evaluative criteria can possibly be established to use with all gifted programs, any more than a specific rating instrument can be used to evaluate all teaching. Such things as goals of the program, type of giftedness, percentage of pupils identified, available resources, teacher competencies, etc. must all be taken into consideration in each local school system; but again, although we cannot define exemplary programs for the gifted, we can recognize them as such where they exist; and such things as classroom climate, pupil attitudes toward learning, positive classroom interaction, and even attendance records will provide important clues in the evaluation process.

As teachers study more and more about gifted programs, they inevitably and correctly, argue that any program or service provided for gifted children will in effect benefit all children and their society. This should encourage the development of such qualitatively-different programs.

Self-Actualization of the Learner

Maintaining the balance between cognitive and affective learning has been offered as an important tenet in establishing programs for the gifted and talented. Schools as formal institutions of learning have long been accustomed to providing

*A program for the gifted offered in the Cleveland, Ohio Public Schools.

learning activities for students in the cognitive domain; so much so, in fact, that the affective domain has in many cases been all but forgotten. While it is true that influences outside the realm of the school tend to play a greater role in the affective development of any student than in his cognitive development, this is not sufficient reason for teachers to neglect this area of development.

Generally speaking, gifted children's affective skills are more highly developed than those of average children. The gifted are usually more concerned about problems of society, such as war, violence, crime, sickness, and poverty. They are more curious than their age-mates about topics such as death and the supernatural. Research cited earlier has demonstrated that this altruistic concern subsides and even disappears despite the fact that the gifted often assume responsible positions as adults in our society. We cannot afford to let this trend continue. Anything the schools can do to nurture this initial concern and to help the gifted translate early concern into subsequent action programs will be effort well spent. Self-actualization denotes the ability to cope with one's own problems to the extent that an individual can rise above these problems and extend help to others in solving their problems. We cannot predict tomorrow's problems; we can only predict change at an unprecedented rate. Thus we cannot offer our gifted students specific content exercises or programs to prepare them for this uncertain future. We can, however, help them to become self-actualized learners. To do otherwise, or to neglect this all-important task, is at best unconscionable.

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